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Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Guyanese President Irfaan Ali at a Joint Press Availability

REMARKS

MARCO RUBIO, SECRETARY OF STATE

STATE HOUSE

GEORGETOWN, GUYANA

MARCH 27, 2025



MODERATOR: Please remain standing. You may be seated. You will be witnessing the signing of the MOU between Guyana and the United States this morning. I now invite Foreign Affairs representative, Mrs. Peggy McLennan, to give an overview.

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MS MCLENNAN: Thank you, Marcia. Your Excellency Mr. President, members of cabinet, ladies and gentlemen, today, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Hugh Hilton Todd and Secretary of State Marco Rubio are signing a Memorandum of Understanding between our two countries to deepen security cooperation and address regional challenges, including countering narcotics trafficking and transnational organized crime. Under this mechanism, Guyana and the United States will strengthen information sharing, synthetic drug detection, transnational organized crime investigations and prosecutions, and military-to-military cooperation.

MODERATOR: Thank you very much. We now have the signing between the two nations.

(The Memorandum of Understanding was signed.)

(Applause.)

MODERATOR: Thank you very much, and now I invite his excellency to address us.

PRESIDENT ALI: Good afternoon, all. Secretary Rubio, you are no stranger to Guyana. Secretary Rubio has been and continues to be a strong advocate for Guyana's development, democracy, and peace. He has consistently demonstrated his personal commitment to the national rule of law, democracy, and security.

Guyana and the United States share a long bond of friendship and partnership. Indeed, the best of partnerships are those built on shared values, mutual trust, and a commitment to the rule of law and international order. This is what underpins our bilateral relationship and friendship. The United States is our trusted partner as we continue to build a stable, secure, and democratic society here.

This visit has allowed us to consolidate our bilateral agenda – defining policies and outlining clear intentions in areas of security, trade, energy, investments, infrastructure, democracy, regional peace and stability, human capital deployment, and development. I am very pleased at the reassurance of the U.S. in ensuring the safeguard of our territorial integrity and sovereignty. Our partnership and joint commitment to the safeguard of this region from every disruptive force is key to the maintenance of democracy and adherence to the rule of law.

The threats from Venezuela were specifically discussed. Their blatant violation of the ICJ order and Argyle Declaration were noted. Our joint commitment in enhanced partnership in combating transnational crime – inclusive of narcotrafficking, human trafficking, money laundering, and all forms of smuggling – is reflected in an enhanced MOU signed today.

We have reassured our partner that we'll continue to ensure all international and local labor laws are adhered to in the hiring of regional and international labor. Further, with our expanding healthcare system and critical shortage of human capital, we'll explore areas of collaboration, filling existing gaps.

We were able to identify key infrastructure that are also critical to regional development as possible areas for investment and development. We have committed to working closely together on the deployment of our energy potential, ensuring greater integration, value creation, and regional energy security, food security, and enhanced trade through joint initiatives to remove hurdles and expand existing areas of interest is key for both countries. I am confident that the outcome of this visit has further aligned our policy agendas, shared commitment, and partnership that will see enormous benefits for our two countries and the region.

Let me once again thank Secretary Rubio for his personal commitment and that of the U.S. government to Guyana and this region in general. I thank you.

(Applause.)

SECRETARY RUBIO: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. President. And we have been working together and interacting for some time during my time in the Senate, but I told him I wanted to wait until I was Secretary of State to visit, and so here I am. And I didn't know that was going to happen, but I'm grateful for your – for this visit and for the warm welcome we've received, and it's an exciting time to be here.

I think – and to the people of Guyana, thank you for welcoming us. I hope you fully appreciate and understand this is one of the most exciting places in the world to be right now, because you have the opportunity, at this moment, to transform this country for generations, and we want to be your partner. We want to be your partner in making that possible. We think it's of mutual benefit to see that happen.

I get to visit in this job – already have – a number of countries in the nine weeks. I've only been on the job for nine weeks, so let the record reflect after nine weeks this was one of my first visits here that I've taken abroad. But we get to visit a lot of counties and when you visit you have some countries, unfortunately, are facing tremendous challenges and they're just looking to stabilize. Other countries are looking to improve and make progress. This country has an opportunity to transform. And that's rare in the history of nations, to have an opportunity for transformative change. And what I mean by transformative change is not simply oil and gas fields. And that's very important – natural resources are critical – but that is just the basic ingredient that allows prosperity to happen.

One of the topics that's talked about all over the world today is data centers and the digitization of the economies, artificial intelligence. Do you know what you need in order to do that? You need to have really good scientists, and engineers, and technicians that know how to run it. But the most important thing you need to be a dominant presence in the world in data centers and artificial intelligence is reliable and affordable energy. That's just one example, among many others.

You have an opportunity to expand, in a responsible way, agriculture production, not just for the needs of your population but for the region, and to do it in a way that safeguards the beauty and the natural environment, that's pristine. You have an opportunity to expand in issues of ecotourism. I'm not a big fan of ecotourism – not – I'm not against ecotourism; I'm not an ecotourist. I like staying at hotels. I'll do it; maybe I'll go somewhere. But there are people that love this stuff. They love it. And you have an opportunity to do that in an incredibly responsible way.

I'm just touching on a few things, but – that are opportunities before you. And that shared prosperity for your country that will come as a result of that is transformative. The lives of your children, the lives of your grandchildren, your lives are going to look very different in five to ten years under this leadership and under this vision as it continues, and we just want to be a partner.

Why do we want to be a partner? Let's – just to be frank, why does the United States care about it? Number one, we care about it because we think it creates a level of stability in the region which we share – which we share. Not just stability here, stability for your neighbors, because we believe prosperity can become contagious. Just like instability can become contagious, stability

and prosperity can become contagious. It won't just help you, it will help all of your neighboring partners in the Caribbean Basin and the region writ large, and we think that ultimately makes life in America safer and more prosperous as well. And so we wanted to look for every opportunity possible to partner with you.

But the basic element of any of this, the basic element of progress and transformation and prosperity, is always security. So number one, we want to make sure that some of the tragic regional problems that exist with crime, transnational crime – we have a huge problem in the world right now with organized gangs and narcotraffickers that destabilize societies – we want to make sure that never reaches here. And that's why today's MOU and the work we'll do together will – is designed not to stop it, but to prevent it from ever taking root, from ever finding its way here. Because unfortunately, sometimes crime is attracted by prosperity and targets prosperity.

And the other are regional threats – the regional threats based on illegitimate territorial claims by a narcotrafficking regime. And I want to be frank, and I've said this during my time as a senator, and I have full confidence in saying now as the Secretary of State: There will be consequences for adventurism. There will be consequences for aggressive actions. And that's why our partnership in that regard will be important. That is not what we want to be a feature of our relationship, but it is a necessity of our relationship, because you have a very difficult challenge on your hands with a dictator that's making illegitimate territorial claims.

And so you have our full commitment and support – today we're demonstrating it – both in tangible ways, and we're going to look for ways to make it long-term and sustainable ways, to make abundantly clear that we are invested both as a nation and from our people in being your partner in transformation and in prosperity. And we will not allow illegitimate territorial claims to be an impediment to your dreams and to your right to develop this country into a symbol that I hope will inspire others to follow the example you set, Mr. President.

So thank you. Thank you for the chance to be with you. (Applause.)

MODERATOR: Thank you very much, Excellency, and Secretary Rubio. Members of the media, in the interests of time, we will accommodate four questions. We will feed two questions from the local media, and two from our visiting media. I recognize Stabroek News from the local media, as well as Mr. Campbell from the local media. From the visiting media – okay, you represent? Good. Great. And – all right, we'll start with Marcelle from Stabroek News.

SECRETARY RUBIO: Hi.

QUESTION: Good afternoon, sir.

SECRETARY RUBIO: Good afternoon.

QUESTION: Marcelle Thomas from the Stabroek News. You just spoke of consequences for aggressive actions, and that the U.S. is Guyana's partner. Given Venezuela's unprovoked aggression towards Guyana, I want to know if your country would stand by Guyana militarily if Venezuela were to attack this country. And what would be the U.S.'s response should Venezuela attack U.S. oil major ExxonMobil, which is operating in Guyana's waters?

SECRETARY RUBIO: It will be a very bad day for the Venezuelan regime if they were to attack Guyana or attack ExxonMobil or anything like – it would be a very bad day, a very bad week for them. And it would not end well for them. (Applause.) I'm not going to get into details of what we'll do; we're not big on those kinds of threats. I think everybody understands, and I want it to be clear – we've made this clear repeatedly – I think the U.S. Navy today is making it clear and demonstrating our ability to – we have a big navy and it can get almost anywhere in the – it can get anywhere in the world. And we have commitments that exist today with Guyana. We want to build on those and expand on those. And we'll leave it for the appropriate time, but suffice it to say that if that regime were to do something such as that, it would be a very bad move. It would be a big mistake for them.

MODERATOR: We now invite from our visiting media. Please remember to identify yourself and the media house you represent.

QUESTION: Hi, thank you. Hello, Mr. Secretary.

SECRETARY RUBIO: Hi.

QUESTION: Hello, Mr. President. Thank you for taking questions from us. We appreciate it. Humeyra Pamuk from Reuters. Mr. Secretary, a Turkish student in Boston was detained and handcuffed on the street by plainclothes agents. A year ago she wrote an opinion piece about the Gaza war. Could you help us understand what the specific action she took led to her visa being revoked? And what was your State Department's role in that process?

SECRETARY RUBIO: We revoked her visa. It's an F1 visa, I believe. We revoked it, and here's why – and I'll say it again; I've said it everywhere. Let me be abundantly clear, okay. If you go apply for a visa right now anywhere in the world – let me just send this message out – if you apply for a visa to enter the United States and be a student and you tell us that the reason why you're coming to the United States is not just because you want to write op-eds, but because you want to participate in movements that are involved in doing things like vandalizing universities, harassing students, taking over buildings, creating a ruckus, we're not going to give you a visa. If you lie to us and get a visa and then enter the United States and with that visa participate in that sort of activity, we're going to take away your visa.

Now, once you've lost your visa, you're no longer legally in the United States, and we have a right, like every country in the world has a right, to remove you from our country. So it's just that simple.

I think it's crazy – I think it's stupid for any country in the world to welcome people into their country that are going to go to their universities as visitors – they're visitors – and say I'm going to your universities to start a riot, I'm going to your universities to take over a library and harass people. I don't care what movement you're involved in. Why would any country in the world allow people to come and disrupt? We gave you a visa to come and study and get a degree, not to become a social activist that tears up our university campuses. And if we've given you a visa and then you decide to do that, we're going to take it away.

I encourage every country to do that, by the way, because I think it's crazy to invite students into your country that are coming onto your campus and destabilizing it. We're just not going to have it. So we'll revoke your visa; and once your visa is revoked, you're illegally in the country and you have to leave. Every country in the world has a right to decide who comes in as a visitor and who doesn't.

If you invite me into your home because you say, "I want to come to your house for dinner," and I go to your house and I start putting mud on your couch and spray-painting your kitchen, I bet you you're going to kick me out. Well, we're going to do the same thing if you come into the United States as a visitor and create a ruckus for us. We don't want it. We don't want it in our country. Go back and do it in your country, but you're not going to do it in our country.

QUESTION: A follow-up?

SECRETARY RUBIO: Sure. Just tell me your follow-up and I'll tell every – and depending on your question, I'll answer it or not.

MODERATOR: No follow-up questions. All right. I now invite our Guyanese –

SECRETARY RUBIO: No, no. She had – can I get her follow-up real quick? Go ahead.

QUESTION: Could you confirm – there's new reporting that 300 visas – State Department has revoked 300 (inaudible).

SECRETARY RUBIO: Maybe more. It might be more than 300 at this point. We do it every day. Every time I find one of these lunatics, I take away their visa.

QUESTION: It could – you're saying it could be more than 300 visas?

SECRETARY RUBIO: Sure. I hope – I mean, at some point I hope we run out because we've gotten rid of all of them. But we're looking every day for these lunatics that are tearing things up. And by the way, we want to get rid of gang members, too.

So Venezuela sent us a bunch of gang members. I'm sure you've heard of Tren de Aragua, Mr. President – a terrible gang, vicious gang. They flooded in our – yesterday – just so everybody knows, yesterday one of these gang members who was involved in New York City in attacking a police officer was deported back to Venezuela, because they're now taking flights again because of some strong measures we've taken. And this guy lands – this guy's a guy that attacked a police officer in New York City and laughed about it in court with a smirk on his face. When he gets off the plane in Venezuela, he's welcomed by this character named Diosdado Cabello. I don't know if you've heard of this guy. And he welcomes him, hugging the guy. So does anybody have any doubt that these people are pushing these people into the United States to destabilize us and the region?

So yeah, we're looking for people like this, and we want to get them out of the United States, absolutely.

MODERATOR: Thank you. We'll now field a question from Guyana.

QUESTION: Thank you. Kurt Campbell, Newsroom. President Ali, you've already spoken about how President Trump's plans – tariff plans for China's ships could affect regional trade. I just wanted to know if in your trade talks today if that issue was specifically discussed –

SECRETARY RUBIO: Yes.

QUESTION: – by Secretary of State Rubio.

SECRETARY RUBIO: And I can tell you – oh, you're asking him. I'm sorry. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: It's for both of you. What assurances can you give Guyana and this hemisphere in terms of stemming indirect consequences?

SECRETARY RUBIO: Yes. Well, that's – look, the goal the President has in doing so is we need to have an ability to build ships in this world that don't just come from China, okay. I think it's just dangerous to have one country in the world building all the ships. I assure you that – and we don't want a war, but I mean, they're not going to build ships for us if we get in trouble, right? So we need to have alternatives to Chinese ships, and we're trying to create a market and a demand for alternatives to Chinese shipping construction. And I'm the first one to admit that the United States made a terrible mistake when we deindustrialized and we allowed all these industries to leave our country and go to other places. Now we're paying the consequences, but we have to fix it.

So I do believe – I can't speak – I don't – the trade portfolio does not belong to the Department of State, but I do believe that we will take this back because we've heard this not just here, Mr. President. We've heard it throughout our visits here in the Caribbean. And we're going to take it back and explain to those who are in charge of trade policy that there are some implications to applying it to certain nations who are partners and who are seeking to develop their economies in ways that I think serve the national interest of the United States, not to mention the national interest of our partners nations, and seeing what can happen.

So I can't make a commitment to those exempt, because that's not something we handle in the Department of State. What I can commit to is that I will most certainly raise this issue as a recurring issue, in multiple places, that it would have a real detrimental effect on economic development. Maybe in 10 years it won't be an issue because there's been some diversification, maybe in five, but right now it would be problematic. That message I'll take back to Washington

and to my colleagues that are handling the trade portfolio, and we'll see how the President decides to proceed. But rest assured we will take that message back.

PRESIDENT ALI: And just to echo the sentiments that, yes, we did discuss it and the region would have raised it also. But there Secretary Rubio is – as he said, will take this back and to see whether there can be any special initiative for the region, given our specific circumstances.

But let me say also that we have a responsibility to our friends. The U.S. is a great friend of ours. The U.S. would have made it very clear that they are ready to stand by us in our development, in our economic expansion, in our security, and in our defense. And I will say very boldly that such friends must have some different and preferential treatment, because a friend who will defend me when I need a friend to defend me, must be a friend that enjoys some special place in our hearts and in our country, and that will be the case. Thank you.

QUESTION: And just quickly, illegal migration was also listed as a topic of discussion. Could you say what are the expectations from Guyana in this regard and any discussions on third-country deportations?

SECRETARY RUBIO: Well, we want to work with you on that. I think that's a problem for you as well. I mean, obviously, because of the combination of your growing economy, labor needs, and your geography, you have been a place where a lot of people have come in, and I think you want it to be the right people, right? So I think if we have information that someone has entered your country who has bad intentions, we want to be able to share that with your government because you don't want that.

You don't want those – if we have information on a Tren de Aragua gang member from Venezuela, we want to make sure that we're – we have collaboration and we're sharing that information. If we have information that some narcotrafficker is taking up shop here and has decided to try to turn this into a base of operation, which could become – could lead to violence and warfare here, gang warfare, we want to be able to share that with you. We want to prevent these problems from happening.

So from the perspective of Guyana, which is not a source country of migration to the United States per se – illegal migration – but it is a country that receives, unfortunately, you're getting a lot of people. And not everybody that comes here – I mean, most people are probably here to

work hard and so forth, but not everyone. So if we have information that someone is in your country that we know is a bad person, we want to be able to share it with you. We want to be able to share it with you very quickly. So that sort of information sharing has to be a cornerstone of this security agreement that we've signed today and want to continue to expand upon.

MODERATOR: We will now field our final question from our visiting media.

QUESTION: Thank you so much. Vera with the – Vera Bergengruen with Wall Street Journal.

SECRETARY RUBIO: They're very tough, this Wall Street – be careful. All right. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Secretary Rubio, when you and President Bukele – you mentioned Tren de Aragua several times. When you and President Bukele negotiated the deal to transfer the U.S. deportees to his prison in CECOT, did you discuss any provisions to ensure that individuals mistakenly identified as gang members would have access to legal recourse and that they can secure their release if they are wrongly brought – wrongfully detained?

SECRETARY RUBIO: Yeah, we have – that list was carefully vetted, provided to us by Homeland Security. We have confidence in it. What we negotiated is the reality that they, in El Salvador, comply with all the international requirements for imprisonment. So we sent them people. It was a combination of people – gang members, people we knew were involved in activities that were not productive to the United States, all of them removable in terms of our laws, all of them; every single one of them was someone who was removable from the United States irrespective – and MS-13 members, some of – many of whom are Salvadoran that we had identified as MS-13 members, that they had helped us identify as well. And that – so it was a combination of people that we sent. And we may send more. We'll see. I mean, it's up to their willingness to accept, but we are grateful to them for the opportunity to do that.

And remember, one of the reasons why we had to send some of those people there was because at the time Venezuela wasn't taking their people back. The Maduro regime – I say Venezuela, but it's not – it's the Maduro regime – was not taking their people back. They refused to take people back, their own people. They have an obligation. If you are a country and someone is illegally in another country, you have an obligation to take those people back, whether they're criminals or not. Venezuela said they wouldn't take them back, so we had to find a place to send them,

especially the ones that had records and – or ones that we had strong suspicions and evidence that were involved in illicit activity.

And so we had to send some to El Salvador because of that. Now they've taken them back. And one of them yesterday gets off an airplane, and this narcotrafficker Cabello greets him and hugs him on the tarmac. Now, what I heard ultimately, by the way, is that some of these gang members we sent back were so bad to Venezuela – they were so bad that after hugging them, maybe not this guy but I don't know, they had to put four or five of them back in jail. Because that's how dangerous these people are, even though they hugged them on the tarmac and put on this show.

These are some really bad people. Tren de Aragua is one of the most dangerous gangs the world has ever seen, okay? When they were held temporarily in Guantanamo while being transferred to Honduras because that's when the Venezuelans picked some of them up, the Marines at Guantanamo said these are some of the roughest people we've ever interacted with. They were worse than the al-Qaida guys that were in their jails. Think about that. So that's who we're getting rid of, and we want to get rid of more of them.

MODERATOR: Ladies and gentlemen, members of the media, this brings the end to our media conference. And I would like to invite his excellency and Secretary Rubio for a photo op right on the stage. (Applause.)

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